

VZCZCXRO1652  
RR RUEHDBU  
DE RUEHYE #0473 0931244  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 031244Z APR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2847  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP

C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000473

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KRCM](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: PRESS ALLEGES "RELIGIOUS SECTS" COLLUDING WITH  
CRIME BOSSES FOR PROTECTION

Classified By: Amb. John M. Evans for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

-----  
IRAVUNK PUBLISHES ALLEGATIONS OF COLLUSION  
-----

¶1. (C) A short, vague, and unsigned article published April 4 in opposition weekly Iravunk, alleged that a "top police official" had information that "religious sects," in particular Mormons and Pentecostals, had established ties with "well known criminals" who protected the "sects' interests" presumably against the government. Iravunk Board Chairman Hayk Babukhanian, whom we contacted following the publication of the story, told us that the "source" was credible and the allegations were factual. Babukhanian told us he would provide further details after gaining permission from his source.

-----  
PRIME MINISTER'S RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CHIEF CLUELESS  
-----

¶2. (C) The Head of the Armenian Prime Minister's National Minorities and Religious Issues Department Hranush Kharatian asserted she was unaware of "anything like this going on." She thanked us for keeping her informed, promised to look into the story and the allegations, and contact us with any updates.

-----  
MORMONS, JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES CLAIM GOVERNMENT CONSPIRACY  
-----

¶3. (C) Church of Latter-day Saints President Lamar Bartholomew dismissed the article as an "unequivocally false" attempt by the GOAM to discredit the Mormon religion. He claimed that the article was retribution against the Church of Latter-day Saints for reporting an incident in which two Mormon missionaries claimed they had been assaulted by police officers in Yerevan.

¶4. (C) Yerevan-based Andre Carbonneau, a Canadian lawyer coordinating legal defense for the Jehovah's Witnesses, alleged the article was further evidence of "government surveillance," in an attempt to show that Jehovah's Witnesses were trying to influence conscientious objectors to avoid military service. "It seems obvious that the Government is searching for ways to accuse Jehovah's Witnesses of acting illegally. It is not surprising that they would do the same to other groups," he said.

-----  
COMMENT: EVERYONE SCRAMBLING, NO ANSWERS  
-----

15. (C) Representatives of the Church of Latter-day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses told us that they would work through the Prime Minister's Religious Issues office to try to find the source of the article and the allegations. We will continue to closely monitor the situation here as each side presents a very different story.

EVANS